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ABSTRACT

Alternative resources, which differentiate language differences from language disorders among bilingual children, are needed for assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Standardized testing is especially troublesome when there are few testing substitutes and no translations in their language, which may incorrectly identify the students as having a disability. An ongoing investigation of culturally relevant assessment for bilingual American Indian children on the Navajo Reservation evolved into a collaborative model of student centered learning. This model provides a comprehensive, authentic, assessment process using multiple data resources. Data sources include, but are not limited to, the student, parents, teachers, counselors, school psychologists, and administrators. This educational community includes primary and secondary stakeholders in the physical, affective, cognitive, and communicative development of the student. In this model all educational stakeholders, including students, are trusted to provide culturally and linguistically relevant information in support of the assessment process. Portfolio assessment provides a more equitable analysis of the student's abilities and performance over time and in a variety of settings rather than traditional reliance on decontextualized data. "An interactive Model for American-Indian Educational Communities" is presented schematically, and "Recommendations for Portfolio Assessment Team Procedures" are included. (Contains 13 references.) (EMK)

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Collaboration Among Educational Stakeholders: Portfolios for American-Indian Students

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Abstract

Our ongoing investigation of culturally-relevant assessment evolved into a collaborative model. This model is a comprehensive, authentic-assessment process using multiple data resources. These data includes, but is not limited to, the student, parents, teachers, counselors, school psychologists, and administrators. This educational community includes primary and secondary stakeholders in the physical, affective, cognitive, and communicative development of the student. Additionally, standardized diagnostic assessment may be culturally and linguistically biased; creating a potentially negative effect that incorrectly identifies the student as having a disability. Based upon our research, we believe that portfolio assessment provides a more equitable analysis of the students' abilities and performance over time and in a variety of settings.

Collaboration Among Educational Stakeholders:

Portfolios for American-Indian Students

Historically, many professionals have been concerned about the issue of nondiscriminatory testing as well as alternatives to standardized testing for the placement of minority students in special education programs (Reschly, 1979, McShane & Plas, 1984; Tempest & Skipper, 1988; Gilliland, 1995; French, Jordan & Tempest ,1997). Court decisions also played an important role in focusing attention on the effect of standardized tests on minority students (Larry P. v. Riles, 1970; Diana v. State Board of Education, 1970). Despite the national determination to avoid testing bias through culturally-sensitive assessment and appropriate placement of students in special education, the results have been less than adequate. There are still few suggested guidelines for alternative assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse students differentiating language differences from language disorders. "When less acculturated minority children are tested with standardized tests (for example the WISC-III) where learning problems cannot be separated from language and cultural differences, mislabeling can result" (Jordan, French & Tempest, 1997, p.25). Standardized testing is especially troublesome when there are few testing substitutes for bilingual students with no translations in their language.

Of special interest to our research are the bilingual American-Indian children on the Navajo Reservation. The Navajo Tribe represents the largest concentration of American Indians in the United States with a population of 224,728 (Navajo Area Indian Health Service, 1990) on a reservation that encompasses Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona. Our study took place at Western

New Mexico University-Gallup Graduate Studies Center in the heart of the Navajo Nation and including the four corners region. We are concerned about the large numbers of bilingual American-Indian children who are subjected to standardized testing in English tied to a curriculum that is also culturally and linguistically biased. Therefore, many limited English proficiency (LEP) students are being mislabeled when communication difficulties might be the result of second-language-learning process and cultural variables.

Decontextualized Assessment

Traditionally, decontextualized assessments, such as test scores, are used to evaluate bilingual Navajo children. Navajo language test translation is attempted by bilingual teachers and school psychologists; however, these specialized Navajo professionals are few in number. Additionally, other Navajo professionals and paraprofessionals are testing students without adequate training in diagnostic assessment. Unfortunately, these often-used tests do not necessarily reflect the range of abilities that the child possesses. Therefore, teachers justifiably are searching for assessments that are authentic, broad-based, and impartial (Campbell, Cignetti, Melenyzer, Nettles, & Wyman, 1997). The over-arching concern is: Does assessment of the American-Indian child reflect the multifaceted nature of the cognitive, affective, communicative, and physical domains across settings?

Review of the literature suggests that some school districts are implementing an approach

referred to as portfolio assessment (Smith, 1998).

> A portfolio (a) is an edited collection of artifacts (materials) that provide a framework for the student to demonstrate knowledge, understanding, experiences, and learning process; (b) is more than an active record of student experiences, it also indicates how goals have been achieved; (c) encourages student self-analysis of academic and personal decisions; and (d) can provide evidence of verifiable learning outcomes (Quattromani and Manygoats, 1998, p. 1).

Quattromani and Manygoats (1998) further define portfolio assessment as a multidisciplinary, collaborative approach including Primary and Secondary Educational Stakeholders (Primary Stakeholders: the student, family, teachers, and administrators and Secondary Stakeholders: the tribe, tribal clan, school, community, and cultural advocates). These stakeholders collaborate for the most comprehensive assessment of the physical, affective, cognitive, and communicative development of the child. Results indicate that it is a more accurate and less biased evaluation of students' overall abilities and focuses on strengths rather than deficits (Bloom & Bacon, 1995; Smith, 1998). Furthermore, the portfolio also includes the learners as participants in the evaluation of their own learning. Clearly, learners know themselves and can contribute heavily to the data collection, review, and analysis process. Graves and Sunstein (1992) suggest "student-centered assessment should be considered a necessary part of student-centered instruction" (p.183).

Trust the Students

Kirkland (1997) beautifully summarizes one of the key elements of student-centered learning; that is, trust ALL of your educational stakeholders to provide culturally and linguistically-

relevant information for support of the assessment process. When I asked my juniors and seniors what I should say to elementary school teachers to help future students such as themselves, they emphatically told me that kids need to be allowed to have choices, to be taught to self-evaluate, and to be encouraged to set individual goals as early in life as possible.

> Most of my students come to me from more or less traditional, teacher-centered classrooms... They are used to having teachers tell them what to learn and what information they are supposed to know. I ask them to choose. . .to develop individual(ly) to evaluate what they can do well and where they need to improve, to set goals for future progress. I ask them to *think* about what they need to learn and want to learn. (p.44.)

If students and families are not at the core of the assessment process, then it is our contention that all other data is biased and lacking the cultural and linguistic relevance necessary for comprehensive, authentic assessment.

Recognizing, Valuing, and Including All Stakeholders

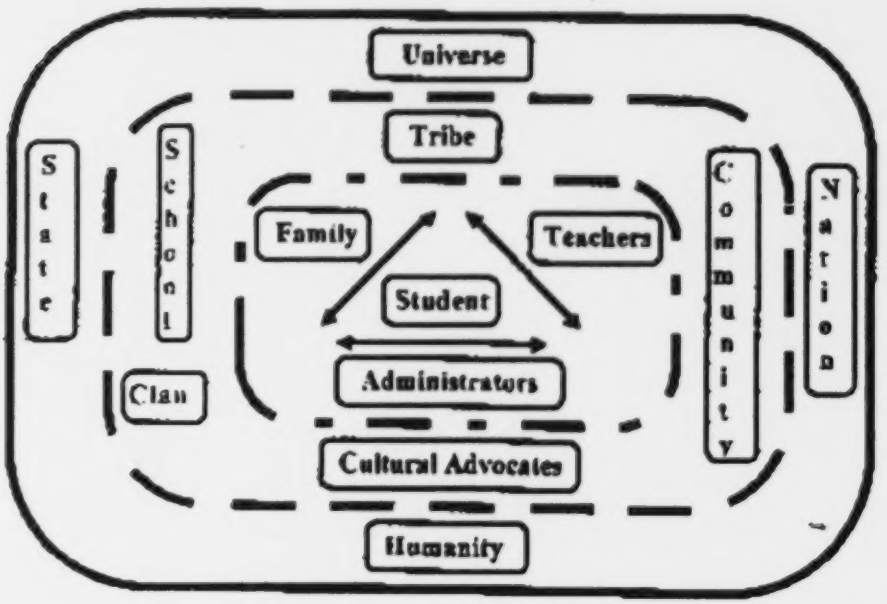
Comer (1996) stated that:

> Parent participation at every level of school activity is illustrative of the assumption that the clients for whom a service is being provided should be involved in the design and implementation of that service... other avenues are also available simply through the way each person is treated with respect and the way the opinion of the person is valued. (p.38.)

Clearly, we must consider that our American-Indian students be empowered to enhance their educational position through information gathered from multiple sources. This is particularly

so with respect to our culturally and linguistically-different students. In Figure 1., Quattromani and Manygoats (1998) graphically portray this notion of multiple information sources among educational stakeholders. These stakeholders serve as an opportunity for communication,

Figure 1. Interactive Model For American-Indian Educational Communities



information, and collaboration. Ultimately, the goal is to fully understand and nurture human potential for improved student achievement. It is very important, however, that we focus not only on student achievement, but also on the quality of the educational experiences offered to the student. *THAT* is what we mean by contextualized measures, assessing students based upon actual classroom, school, home, and community experiences *NOT* those that are presumed by external measures.

Conceptual Development

A portfolio's meaningfulness is enhanced and magnified by the degree to which it is based upon and reflects the cultural community's educational beliefs. Without a philosophical grounding and evidence of beliefs that are congruent with the American-Indian, cultural community, the portfolio tends to become a scrapbook. The reflective dimension of the portfolio makes it a powerful learning and assessment tool. The power of the portfolio will be enhanced when the meaningfulness of the portfolio is congruent with the cultural community's educational goals and philosophy.

Recommendations for Portfolio Assessment Team (PAT) Procedures

Determine the PAT Members and Their Roles and Goals Who are the educational stakeholders that are directly involved with the child referred for special services? This may include any or all of the stakeholders identified in Figure 1.

Collect Relevant Artifacts, Including

Academic products. (a) culturally-sensitive test scores, (b) anecdotal records, (c) videotapes, (d) audiotapes, (e) academic samplings, (f) social history, (g) writing samples, (h) miscue analysis and/or reading probes, and so forth.

Observational records. Records of the child's behavior during routine activities within a variety of settings (a) academic and nonacademic classrooms (P.E., Art, Music), (b) playground,

(c) transition times, (d) cafeteria, (e) school bus, (f) field trips, (g) family, (h) community, and so forth;

Linguistic Development and Cross-Cultural Use Herein lies the important domain of assessing speech and language ability in the dominant language as well as second language.

Essential questions. For the limited English proficiency (LEP) student we must consider these Essential Questions: (a) Does the student exhibit problems in both languages? (b) Are problems related to normal second-language acquisition or dialectal phenomena? (c) Are the problems due to cross-cultural interference? (d) Are the problems or interpretation of problems due to bias? and/or (e) Are there any other external variable?

Linguistic and play autobiography. The PAT guides the family in the development of a profile including a timeline of critical incidents encompassing both positive and negative experiences, family interactional analysis, and ethnographic observation.

Final Recommendation for Student Placement Based on the PAT teams comprehensive data analysis, the critical determination for placement is how close is this child functioning in comparison to his/her peers from similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds as well as comparable peer groups from around the country.

The portfolio assessment model for placement of students in special services, therefore, provides an opportunity to "allow evaluators to overcome the professional dilemma of having to pit

the best interests of the student with responsibilities of the job" (Hamayan & Damico, 1991, p. 314). Additionally, "these professionals can act as both agents of the educational system and advocates for the culturally and linguistically diverse students they serve. In effect, this empowers the evaluators as well as the students" (p. 314). The empowerment of all educational stakeholders is critical to the appropriate placement of American-Indian children.

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